



ANGER BUSTERS FOR KIDS

Hint: It Starts With You



Your child is yelling, slamming doors and having an all-out tantrum ... but can he trust you with his anger? Punishing the

behaviors associated with anger might be a quick fix, but without instruction your child will lose out. National anger management trainer Bob Bowen warns that children who never learn proper ways to express their frustration will eventually find their own, often inappropriate, methods. "At 7 years old she may be yelling or pulling someone's hair, but by age 16 she will have developed 15 other incorrect ways to say 'I'm frustrated.' She has to find her own path because, as parents, we haven't given her the correct one."

The road to teaching proper "anger behavior" can be extremely bumpy when parents are sucked into the heat of the moment. **Parents need first to handle their own emotions.**

Kirk Martin, president of Celebrate Calm says this about control, "Realize that we cannot control our kids, nor should we want to. Our primary job as parents is to control ourselves and model proper behavior. How many of us throw our adult tantrums when something goes wrong, then expect our children to remain calm? When we are calm, we can solve problems instead of creating more of them."

Teaching discipline instead of punishing the child equips him with anger management tools that can be used the rest of his life. Here are nine things you can do to help your child learn how to express his anger positively.

1. Model anger management.

"Mommy is feeling very angry right now, so I'm going to take time to be alone and get some self-control." Take the time to get your anger under control before dealing with the situation. Martin says that no matter what your child does, remain calm.

Screaming or withdrawing emotion ally only makes the situation worse.

2. Have respect and show respect.

"We are not responsible for our children's behavior, attitudes and actions," Martin explains. "If your child is in a bad mood, so be it. Choose not to give into or join his pity party. If your child comes into the kitchen barking orders and being rude, you are not obligated to respond. Walk away calmly, go about your business and let your child know that when he's ready to talk and be polite, you'll help him." Don't get pulled into his anger by calling names or getting physical.

3. Assume a Calm Posture. When your child comes to you ask yourself, "Do I want to have a conversation or a confrontation?" Instead of lecturing to your child for his anger, SIT DOWN, put your feet up and relax. It is much harder to yell (and be yelled at) when you assume a calm posture.

4. Give them words to express their anger.

Some children feel so out of control themselves that they don't know how to verbally express what they are feeling. Calmly say to them, "I know you are disappointed (sad, frustrated, etc.)." Some experts suggest using drawings of facial emotions to help young children show you what they are feeling.



5. Identify with their pain.

Sometimes kids just want to know that they're not alone in what they're feeling. "I remember when I didn't get to go to a party..." Explain how you handled it and whether it was constructive or you could have handled it better. Tell a story of a time that you did handle disappointment (or other emotion) well.

6. Set positive limits. Instead of saying, "Don't you throw that doll," say, "After you put the doll on the table, we can go have snack."

7. Redirect energy bursts that often come with anger. Encourage positive outlets like running, jumping, blowing into a horn or painting.

8. Avoid power struggles with your child. They're always lose-lose situations. If your goal is to control, you will teach him to control others. When you get pulled into his anger, you become his puppet by giving your child complete power over your emotions and actions. You are setting up a power struggle that you will always lose.

9. Provide a cooling-off period by reading a book together, coloring or going on a walk. Once all parties are calm, discuss what happened and make a plan for next time. This is a good time to discuss what caused the emotion, how it could have been prevented and solutions for next time. Be careful not to revive his anger again. Speak calmly, not lecturing and stay in control of your emotions.

A child of any age expects his parent to be the one in control, especially in times when he is not. Martin says that we need to ask ourselves what our goals are. "Do we want to change his current behavior or do we want to teach him to make good decisions? We can change behavior easily if that is the only goal." He becomes angry and misbehaves and we provide a consequence. This will sometimes correct the behavior. "But all it has done is coerced him into making the decision we wanted him to make. In the short term, he does what we want, but we haven't changed his heart, his internal motivation, or provided ways for him to take responsibility for his own emotions and behaviors." This is fine if you want to be responsible for his behavior for the rest of his life. Make him responsible. One way to change his internal motivation is to give him the tools we've suggested to help him first gain control of his emotions. We'll talk more on this in future issues of Parentalk.